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THE INFLUENCE OF THOREAU ON THE AMERICAN NATURE
ESSAY (An address to the Thoreau Society 15 July
1978) by Paul O. Williams

In spite of the title of this paper, it is not really scholarly. The subject is far too broad for coverage in the time of the traditional Thoreau Society address. Rather than limiting my range to a portion of Thoreau's influence I could examine in detail, I would like to take a sweeping view of this neglected area of study. There is room here for many investigations, and it is my hope that this presentation may stimulate some of them.

I would like at the outset to make a distinction between the broad and amorphous category of writing we hear referred to often as "nature writing" and the sub-category I will consider here as the American nature essay. I admit readily that the distinction may be somewhat artificial, but I feel it is useful, and especially so in speaking of Thoreau's influence.

What I mean by the nature essay is non-fiction which focuses not only on the facts of natural history but makes inquiry into their feel, their relationship to man and his interests, nature, and being. It is always writing done with conscious artistry, with a genuine literary knowledge and quality. It has a philosophical dimension, but its philosophy is of the literary kind, growing out of observation and resting all its weight on real perceptions. Loren Eiseley sees Thoreau in his journals as "a man sorting, selecting, questioning less nature than his own way into nature, to find . . . 'a patent for himself.'"¹ That is the combination. The nature essay is written by people who feel that in the natural world there is, somehow, a hieroglyph which, if they can just read it, will turn out to be their own names.

Certainly Thoreau was such a person. The nature essay is a place where natural history, philosophy, and literature meet. Thoreau has a place in all three disciplines. This lifts his work above much nature writing. After all, one doesn't want merely to read about someone else's day in the wild. We all have our own days. But his illuminations there, his response to those magnificent stimuli--that is another thing altogether.²

My stipulative definition leaves out a number of categories of nature writing, even some in which Thoreau has had a manifest or probable influence. Nature fiction such as Ernest Thompson Seton's animal biographies, or the recent studies of Sally Carrigher, *One Day at Teton Marsh*, *One Day at Beetle Rock*, or *The Twilight Seas* are another strain, as are Robert Murphy's *The Pond* or *The Stream*. Incidental accounts of someone's personal observations of nature, which do not take into account

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the significance, the impression, the subjective quality, other than sentiment, of what was observed, do not to my sense fall into the category. Behavioral studies, such as Robert Ardrey's *African Genesis* or *The Territorial Imperative*, have other roots. Though they resemble the form I am discussing, they begin with a single thesis, of the continuity of behavior among man, other primates, and other animals, and develop their speculations on that. This limits the free play of inquiry one finds in the essay. Natural history textbooks I would not include either since their focus is on fact rather than on the significance of fact. Nor would I include environmental activism. Such texts direct themselves, ultimately, toward techniques rather than essence, politics rather than values.

A lot remains, a very large literature of fine books and shorter essays of a type Americans must value, judging by their popularity. Such writing may vary in nature and aim, but it still falls within or borders on literature which may be described by my definition above. What is important for us here is that as far as I have been able to tell, for all intents and purposes, Thoreau invented this sub-genre of nature writing.³

Certainly there was much nature writing before Thoreau, and he had his precedents in the poetry of Wordsworth, the rich philosophical and religious literature of New England,⁴ the botanizing habits of his neighbors, the essay form so finely honed in his time and region, and the work of Emerson. Travel literature, of which the nineteenth century produced so many fine examples, surely contributed an element to Thoreau's nature essay form. So did the native wit of his culture, his compositional instruction at Harvard, and his wide reading, both ancient and modern.

Gilbert White's *The Natural History of Selbourne*⁵ is sometimes cited as a precedent. It is indeed a charming and informative book, and one can find in it examples of the sort of probing beyond the fact that is so habitual with Thoreau, but not that many. Its investigations into natural history are conducted by a religiously comfortable country parson,

*THOREAU SOCIETY WINTER MEETING *
* Don't forget that the Thoreau Society will *
*hold its first winter meeting in conjunction *
*with the annual meeting of the Modern Language *
*Association in New York City on December 27, *
*1978, at 9 p.m. in the Gibson A Suite of the *
*Hotel Hilton. Raymond Gozzi will speak on *
*"Thoreau and I: A Personal Note" and Walter *
*Harding on "Thoreau and Eros." *

and do not contain the same hunger in ontological search that one finds in Thoreau. Thoreau cites White four times in the journals; each time his interest is in the naturalist's observations.

William Gilpin's picturesque travel writing is also cited as a source for Thoreau. Here, even in Thoreau's own opinion in the journals, Gilpin was not writing what Thoreau was after. His journal references to Gilpin, spanning the period of March 31, 1852 to November 8, 1858, show that Thoreau read him extensively and with real interest.⁶ On January 8, 1854, however, Thoreau objects to a certain shallowness in Gilpin's concept of nature in his "Essay on Picturesque Travel," concluding, "The elegant Gilpin. I like his style and manners better than anything he says."⁷ This opinion seems confirmed the next month, when he remarks, "Gilpin talked as if there was some food for the soul in mere physical light and shadow, as if, without the suggestion of a moral, they could give a man pleasure or pain!"⁸

Perhaps this last comment gives one of the bases of Thoreau's originality--his transcendentalism. What he means by "the suggestion of a moral" is, of course, to be very liberally viewed. Thoreau, as we all know, wasn't pasting on moral tags, but he was always vitally concerned with how people should conduct their lives. This concern, as any reader of the early journal knows, predated his deep involvement in nature. It is this interest to which he addresses himself persistently, by means of the insights derived from his observations of things natural.

In *Walden* is a mini-essay familiar to you all which illustrates this method. Thoreau is describing the hares nibbling his potato peelings:

Near at hand they only excited my pity. One evening one sat by my door two paces from me, at first trembling with fear, yet unwilling to move; a poor wee thing, lean and bony, with ragged ears and sharp nose, scant tail and slender paws. It looked as if Nature no longer contained the breed of nobler bloods, but stood on her last toes. Its large eyes appeared young and unhealthy, almost dropsical. I took a step, and lo, away it scud with an elastic spring over the snow crust, straightening its body and its limbs into graceful length, and soon put the forest between me and itself,--the wild free venison, asserting its vigor and the dignity of Nature. Not without reason was its slenderness. Such then was its nature.⁹

The moral comment, for such we may call it, is clear here, though implied. It is perception beyond the surface, commentary on human values and the vitality of the natural life. To this he adds a prose-poem of lyric praise:

What is a country without rabbits and partridges? They are among the most simple and indigenous animal products; ancient and venerable families known to antiquity as to modern times; of the very hue and substance of Nature, nearest allied to leaves and to the ground,--and to one another; it is either winged or it is legged. It is hardly as if you had seen a wild creature when a rabbit or a partridge bursts away, only a natural

one, as much to be expected as rustling leaves.

Who had expended such insight, or cherished this subject with such precise language before Thoreau? Only poets, probably, and then not in the ranked and marshalled masses which constitute the bulk of Thoreau's fine nature writing. Here was a new thing--a new literary sub-genre and a superior writing standard against which all subsequent writers in the form would have to measure themselves.¹⁰

Surely it is significant that Thoreau came to the nature essay form with a deep and broad literary background. As you well know, the young Thoreau was a bookish person. In the early journals, his interminable lists of literary and historical figures show the breadth of interest and keenness of perception of one well educated in the liberal arts before things natural really began to stir his depths. Of course the interest was always there, and the excursions of his boyhood simply matured into a remarkable manhood, but his early accounts of the wild tend to be generalized, aesthetic, and literary. The later fusion of his literary background, philosophical depth, transcendental attitude, and commitment to the natural world have given us this new thing that has shaped the development of an entire literature.

As we all know, it was not for some time that the accomplishments of Thoreau as a nature essayist were to be acknowledged. This enabled the first serious subsequent writer in the form, John Burroughs, to perceive Thoreau's shortcomings somewhat more clearly than later writers have. Probably as well Burroughs did not perceive Thoreau's accomplishment as clearly as he might have.

But like Burroughs, many of the major writers in the nature essay form, as I have described it, as well as some minor contributors to it, are active Thoreauvians--students of his work, commentators on him, or at least acknowledgers that Thoreau is a burden to some, an enduring rock in the stream of time, which parts the waters, and which looks to be there jutting up in the sun a long time. For such the Thoreauvian influence is a challenge or threat.

But there are other aspects of this influence, and to them I would like to devote the rest of this presentation. Thoreau has functioned as an example, a dimension, an approach, a precedent, a subject, a source, and an anthology. And, of course, as a sacred cow.

In fact, Thoreau functioned in all those capacities but the last to John Burroughs. For example, "Pepacton" recounts a boat trip Burroughs took down the east branch of the Delaware River in emulation of Thoreau's *A Week*.¹¹ Burroughs' repeated essays on Thoreau gave us some of the most perceptive of early commentary. Surely the most important of these, "Henry D. Thoreau," first printed in the *Century Magazine* of July, 1882, and later in *Indoor Studies*, in 1889, is a rich and penetrating appreciation. It is significant, I feel, that the essay is more about Thoreau the man and Thoreau the writer than about Thoreau the naturalist, though the natural was Burroughs' preeminent interest. Burroughs undervalued Thoreau's abilities as a naturalist, writing, "He has added no new line or touch to the portrait of bird or beast that I can recall,--no important or significant fact to their lives."¹² But he adds that this was not

what Thoreau was looking for. "His eye," writes Burroughs, "was not penetrating and interpretive. It was full of speculation; it was sophisticated with literature, sophisticated with Concord, sophisticated with himself. His mood was subjective rather than objective. He was more intent on the natural history of his own thought than on that of the bird."¹³

For our purposes, one can only say that Burroughs could not have written his 1882 essay without having read Thoreau widely and deeply. The fact that he himself is not more Thoreauvian, and perhaps that his books now gather so much dust on the shelves of second-hand stores, resulted from his desire to be more of a naturalist and less of a philosopher, a penetrator, a stylist. Often Burroughs' idea of objectivity results in triviality, in the "I went here, then I went there, then I saw that, and then I did this" tendency of many nature writers, whose writing does not flower into thought, or flash with wit, whose writing may particularize, but in such a way that the particulars will not universalize and become memorable.

When we reach the writing of a naturalist like Edwin Way Teale, we find the influence of Thoreau acquires a new dimension. I think we can say that no nature essayist has known the writing of Thoreau, especially the journal, with the intimacy that Teale does. Not only has his wife Nellie, read him the entire text of the journal aloud, but Teale has read the journal through twice more and edited his favorite selections from Thoreau for The Thoughts of Thoreau.¹⁴ Thoreau seems to creep into almost every Teale volume, including even The Strange Lives of Familiar Insects. Teale has edited selections from both Audubon and John Muir,¹⁵ and made his own anthology of a great variety of commentators on nature, in his Green Treasury,¹⁶ but it is still to Thoreau that he returns most frequently. A past president of this society, Teale is surely our own expert on Thoreau the naturalist.

But has this influenced his own writing? Surely, as is proper with a Thoreauvian, he is his own man. Still, there are resemblances. Both writers have found ways of writing about themselves in an impersonal way, with an outward turn of mind, and without sentimentality or triviality, lifting the text above the merely autobiographical. Like Thoreau, Teale writes both travel and backyard books. Both men have rich literary resources which find their way into their nature essays. Both have an inability to resist an amusing story. Both are highly conscious literary stylists in a type of writing in which, in general, one too often encounters merely plodding exposition. Both men feel and convey their interior leap of joy at some observation or perception, giving their feel for the natural world a lyric and emotive thrust. Both have that careful and dogged patience which enables them to outwait the slow processes they are observing--to stay there until something happens and to see it.¹⁷

Both writers give specific descriptions, as for example of bird song, but both add the sense of the lift of spirit the observation has brought.

What we get in each case is what Teale has called "that feeling," adding, "It is an inner emotional response that cannot be counterfeited."¹⁸

While Teale's approach to Thoreau is that of a naturalist, Loren Eiseley comes at him from another

direction--that of a philosophical paleontologist who finds in Thoreau the expression of some of his own persistent concerns. Surely Eiseley has added to the nature essay in our time a stylistic lyricism, a philosophical depth, and a breadth of vision in time that are, if not unique, at least highly original. As an evolutionist, deeply believing in the viability of the slow workings of nature through vast sweeps of time, he was deeply troubled by the speed of change that western man has introduced into the natural world. "We in the western world," he writes, "have rushed eagerly to embrace the future--and in so doing we have provided that future with a strength it has derived from us and our endeavors. Now, stunned, puzzled and dismayed, we try to withdraw from the embrace, not of a necessary tomorrow, but of that future which we have invited and of which, at last, we have grown perceptibly afraid."¹⁹

It is significant that such a writer should return to Thoreau as often as he does. Eiseley sees Thoreau in part as a futurist.²⁰ It strikes him that Thoreau saw "human civilizations as toadstools sprung up in the night by solitary roads."²¹ When Thoreau describes the pickerel in Walden as "animalized water," Eiseley sees this as a "moment of strange insight," for he, from an evolutionary rather than a transcendental point of view, agrees.²² In his last, posthumous essay on Thoreau, Eiseley, perhaps reading into the Concordian a measure of his own feeling, calls him "a spiritual wanderer through the deserts of the modern world."²³ Yet, as we well know, for Thoreau there was a very vivid alternative world around him.

It is both a literary and a philosophical concern for Thoreau that has made Joseph Wood Krutch another persistent Thoreauvian as well as a nature essayist of some skill. A Broadway drama critic from 1924 until 1952, Krutch spent his last years, until his death in 1970, as a naturalist and nature essayist in the American southwest. Brooks Atkinson, whose interests are remarkably similar,²⁴ has reminded us that Krutch did not read Walden until he was thirty-seven. He says, "Since he was always his own man, it would be unfair to imply that Thoreau's Walden changed his mind." But he adds that after Krutch wrote his critical biography of Thoreau in 1948,²⁵ "For the rest of Krutch's life, Thoreau was in his mind. Krutch quoted no other writer as much."²⁶

Like so many nature essayists of recent times, Krutch despaired at some of the directions the modern world has taken. In 1967, his opinion was that while Thoreau's reputation had "grown steadily since his death," "his actual influence upon society as a whole is very nearly nil."²⁷ This was a matter of some anguish to Krutch.

In reading a book like Krutch's on the Grand Canyon, one finds a simple gauge of the nature of his apprehension of Thoreau. In the first 229 pages of text, he cites or quotes Thoreau twice. In the remaining 47, Thoreau appears twelve times. The first section is largely expository. The last chapters are more probing. Krutch is expressing his concern for the survival of the natural world. He remarks at one point, "In each of the five or six 'nature books' I have written there has come a time when it was impossible not to quote a certain sentence from Thoreau."²⁸ It is not the comparison of observations that Krutch turns to. It is Thoreau's essayist dimension, his literary and

philosophical side.

As a nature essayist, Krutch is far more a man of letters than a research naturalist. He has not the infinite patience of a Teale,²⁹ nor the depth of background knowledge. But his search beyond observation, to significances, is in the best Thoreauvian tradition, and he is a soldier in the camp of nature embattled.

I can't close without a word about Annie Dillard's exquisite Pilgrim at Tinker Creek of 1974.³⁰ While it would be easy to exaggerate Dillard's Thoreauvian tendencies, she is a past member of this society and fits the pattern of the man of letters deeply concerned with the natural world.³¹ While details of her natural observations may sometimes be imperfect, nonetheless her inquiry into the nature of natural life, and her attempts to reconcile herself with its cruelties, put the book in the best nature essay tradition. As one might expect, she quotes Thoreau. She also names her goldfish Ellery Channing, refers to a large array of nature writers, chief of whom is Teale,³² bores into her subject with an eye sharpened by the need to see beyond fact to value and meaning. And she writes in a remarkable prose.³³

There is much more to say, but I must end. However, I would like to offer one final and perhaps rash generalization. Today is not, as a whole, a rich time for the traditional essay form. People now write articles--by the hundreds and thousands--being often more concerned with how to do a thing than why they are doing it. But the essay is alive and well and residing a good part of its time among nature writers. I like to think that Thoreau had a lot to do with that. We have seen that a number of the best of the nature essayists are Thoreauvians.³⁴ Surely this is no accident. Obviously there is a fellow feeling. Beyond that, there is often an influence, and the sturdiness and agility of Thoreau's prose, and the extent of his work, have set a standard for the genre that has greatly enriched this aspect of our culture.

FOOTNOTES

¹"Thoreau's Vision of the Natural World," The Illustrated World of Thoreau, ed. Howard Chapnick (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1974), p. 171. This is the text of the main address at the Thoreau Society meeting of 1973.

²Joseph Wood Krutch, in his biography, Henry David Thoreau (New York: William Sloan Associates, 1948), p. 113, notes that "Thoreau the 'nature writer' seems to owe less to any predecessors than Thoreau the mystic owes to Carlyle and, directly or indirectly, to the other radicals who were inspiring all New England to Utopian experiments."

³For a remarkable and informative recent appreciation see Edwin Way Teale's Springtime in Britain (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1970), pp. 133-152.

⁴He praises Gilpin's Forest Scenery (1971) on April 1, 1852, writing that it is "a pleasing book, so moderate, temperate, graceful, roomy, like a gladed wood; not condensed; with a certain religion in its manners and respect for all the good of the past, rare in more recent books; and it is grateful to read after them. Somewhat spare indeed in the thoughts as in the sentences. Some of the cool wind of the copses converted into grammatical and graceful sentences, without heat." The Journal of

Henry D. Thoreau, ed. Bradford Torrey and Francis H. Allen (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1906), III, 370. He adds, "Gilpin's is a book in which first there is nothing to offend, and secondly something to attract and please." (III, 373).

⁵Journal, VI, 59.

⁶Journal, VI, 103.

⁷Walden, ed. J. Lyndon Shanley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), pp. 281.

⁸Their editors and reviewers often do it for them, referring to Thoreau with an almost inevitable regularity.

⁹See Perry D. Westbrook, John Burroughs (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1974), pp. 60-61. Westbrook's account of the relationship of Thoreau to Burroughs exaggerates Burroughs' criticisms of Thoreau in, apparently, a curious attempt to build Burroughs' stature in comparison.

¹⁰Indoor Studies (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1904), 39.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²(New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1962).

¹³Audubon's Wildlife (New York: Viking Press, 1964) and The Wilderness World of John Muir (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1954).

¹⁴This volume is subtitled "A Journey Through the World's Great Nature Writing" (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1952).

¹⁵While Teale may not have followed a regimen of rigorous walking to record the progress of the seasonal flowers, I myself suspect that he would have stayed to the end of the ant war and given us many more particulars. See Walden, pp. 228-230. There are, of course, many great differences in personality.

¹⁶Springtime in Britain (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1970), p. 228. See also pp. 150-52.

¹⁷Walden, p. 310.

¹⁸Letter to the present writer, 25 June 1978.

¹⁹The Firmament of Time (New York: Atheneum Publishers, 1960), p. 117.

²⁰See, e.g., "Thoreau's Vision of the Natural World," p. 171.

²¹The Night Country (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), p. 148.

²²The Immense Journey (New York: Random House, 1957), p. 20.

²³"Thoreau's Unfinished Business," Natural History 87 (March 1978), 6. Surely this is a Thoreau somewhat more existential than he really was and reflective of a shift from the extraordinarily penetrating essay Eiseley gave at the Thoreau Society in 1973. His vision of Thoreau seems to have undergone a shift toward the bleak between 1973 and 1977.

²⁴Atkinson's well-known books of dramatic criticism are supplemented by his editing of the Modern Library Walden and Other Writings in 1950 and by a late volume of his own nature essays, This Bright Land: A Personal View (New York: Natural History Press, 1972).

²⁵See note 3 above.

²⁶"The Many Worlds of Joseph Wood Krutch," Saturday Review 53 (25 July 1970), 17.

²⁷"Who Was Henry Thoreau," Saturday Review 50 (19 August 1967), 18.

²⁸Grand Canyon: Today and All its Yesterdays (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1957) p. 234.

²⁹Offered the opportunity, as he describes it in The Living Desert (New York: William Sloane Associates, 1952), p. 104 ff., of making further discoveries about the life of the spadefoot toad,

Krutch dissipates the discussion in joking about bating of experts. His readers are left with the questions Krutch aroused in them.

³⁰(New York: Harper's Magazine Press).

³¹Her literary side is brought out in poems and essays having little or no natural reference. A volume of poems, for example, Tickets for a Prayer Wheel, was published by the University of Missouri Press in 1974.

³²Among her many references, she calls The Strange Lives of Familiar Insects "a book I couldn't live without." One could more easily call her a Tealeophile, perhaps, than a Thoreauvian.

³³Josephine Johnson's The Inland Island (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1969) is a much better example of a nature essay in which style rather than depth of study makes the book work. Johnson has used the nature essay form to express feelings about the world of the time that have little to do with natural life itself, which she often joylessly dislikes. While a New York Times review makes the inevitable comparison with Walden, there is little similarity, though Johnson uses the familiar structure of the year for her text. Pilgrim, on the other hand, dazzles with its style but has substance as well.

³⁴Lack of space has prevented me from fully owning up to the fact that there are others of first rank, for instance John Muir, Rachel Carson, and John Hay, who are not Thoreauvians, though the latter two are in a sense natural descendents.



1-11-54

These drawings are reproduced from Thoreau's Journal. If you wish to identify them, simply look up the journal entry for the date indicated in the numerals.

THOREAU'S LETTER OF AUGUST 5, 1836, TO CHARLES WYATT RICE: A NEW TEXT Edited by George Hendrich and Fritz Oehlschlaeger

We have found in the Collection of Dr. Samuel Arthur Jones at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign a fair copy of Thoreau's letter of August 5, 1836, to Charles Wyatt Rice; the copy is of great significance since the original has disappeared and the two early editors who published the letter (E. B. Hill and F. B. Sanborn) made major and minor errors when they transcribed it, Sanborn's mistakes being the most egregious. We present here the fair copy version, with our reasoning for its adoption as the preferred text of the letter; additionally we include the following sketch of Rice, whom previous Thoreau editors have identified only as Thoreau's class-mate.

Charles Wyatt Rice was a member of the Harvard Class of 1837. Born in Brookfield, Massachusetts, in 181-, he was proud of his laboring-class origins, as his entry in the Class Book reveals: "My father is a blacksmith, and to this fact I probably owe the feelings of indignation, with which I have so frequently heard the laboring portion of the community scornfully spoken of. It has strongly imbued my sentiments with radicalism, and made me feel a deep interest in the class from which I am

sprung."¹ Undoubtedly Rice's attitude toward labor and his radicalism appealed to Thoreau, and their one surviving letter indicates the two were on cordial terms. With Henry Vose and Thoreau, Rice participated in a conference which was part of the 1837 Harvard graduation ceremony; the conference topic was "The Commercial Spirit of Modern Times, Considered in Its Influence on the Political, Moral, and Literary Character of a Nation." After graduation, Rice went South because of his health, first to Charleston, South Carolina, where he taught briefly, and then to Griffin, Georgia, where he worked as assistant editor of a literary journal, read law, and then entered into law practice. He married in 1841 and was the father of one son, who entered the Confederate army and died at the age of twenty-one. Rice himself died in 1844 of "bilious fever."

In an undated note written on the fair copy of Thoreau's letter to Rice, Dr. Samuel Arthur Jones (1834-1912), the prominent Ann Arbor, Michigan, homeopathic physician whose avocation was Thoreau scholarship, wrote: "This copy was procured for me by L. P. Gould, of Owosso, Mich. (now deceased) from some relative of Mr. Rice--the holograph being treasured as a precious memento." We have been unable to learn anything about Rice's relative whom Gould contacted or the fate of the holograph.

The Gould transcription of the letter is as follows:

Concord, August 5th, 1836.

Friend Rice,

You say you are in the hay-field: How I envy you! Methinks I see thee stretched at thy ease by the side of a fragrant rick, with a mighty flagon on one hand, a cold eel slice in the other, and most ravenous appetite to boot. So much for haying. Now as I cannot hay nor scratch dirt, I manage to keep soul and body together another way. I have been manufacturing a kind of vessel in miniature, not a pyrochloa, as Homer has it, but a kind of oblong bread-trough. In days of yore, 'tis said, the swimming alder Fashioned rude, with branches lopt, and stripped of its smooth coat, Where fallen tree was none, and rippling streams vast breadth Forbade adventurous leap, the brawny swain did bear Secure to farthest shore. The book has passed away, and with the book the lay Which in my youthful days I loved to ponder. Of curious things it told, how wise men 3 of Gotham In a bowl did venture out to sea, And darkly hints their awful fate. If men have dared the main to tempt in such frail barks, Why may not wash tub round, or bread-troughs square oblong Suffice to cross the purling wave and gain the destin'd port. What, think you, do these capitals mean? When I begin to feel bluey I just step into my hog-trough, leave care behind, and drift along our sluggish stream at the mercy of the winds and waves. The following is an extract from the log-book of the Red Jacket, Captain Thoreau. Set sail from the Island--the Island! how expres-

sive!--reached Thayer's after a tedious voyage, having encountered a head wind during the whole passage--waves running mountain high, with breakers to the leeward however, arrived safe, and after a thorough refit, being provided with extra cables & a first-rate birch main-mast, weighed anchor at 3 o'clock P.M. Aug. 1st, 1836, N. S. Wind blowing N. N.E. The breeze having increased to a gale, tack'd ship--stationed myself at the helm and prepared for emergencies. Just as the ship was rounding point Dennis a squall struck her, under a cloud of canvas, which swept the deck. The aforesaid mast went by the board, carrying with it our only mainsail. The vessel being left at the mercy of the waves, was cast ashore on Nawshawtuck beach. -- Natives a harmless, inoffensive race, principally devoted to agricultural pursuits--appeared somewhat astonished that a stranger should land so uncereemoniously on the coast - got her off at 20 minutes of 4, and after a short and pleasant passage of 10 minutes arrived safely in port with a valueable cargo.-- "Epistolary matter", says Lamb, "usually comprises 3 topics, news, sentiment and puns." Now as to news I dont know the coin--the newspapers take care of that. Puns I abhor and more especially deliberate ones. Sentiment alone is immortal, the rest are short-lived--evanescent. Now this is neither matter-of-fact, nor pungent, nor yet sentimental--it is neither one thing nor the other, but a kind of hodge-podge, put together in much the same style that mince pies are fabled to have been made, ie, by opening the oven door, and from the further end of the room, casting in the various ingredients--a little lard here, a little flour there--now a round of beef and then a cargo of spices--helter skelter.

I should like to crawl into those holes you describe--what a crowd of associations 'twould give rise to!

"One to once, gentlemen".

As to Indian remains the season for grubbing is past with me, the Doctor having expressly forbidden both digging and chopping. My health is so much improved that I shall return to C. next term if they will receive me. French I have certainly neglected, Dan Homer is all the rage at present.

This from your friend and classmate,
D. H. Thoreau

P.S. It would afford me much pleasure if you would visit our good old town this vacation, in other words, myself. Dont fail to answer this forthwith, tis a good thing to persevere in well doing. How true it is that the postscript contains the most important matter invariably.³

Lucius Gould (1847-1904), who secured this letter, was born in Michigan and graduated in law from the University of Michigan. He was interested in local history and at one time was editor of the Owosso Times.⁴ We hope he was an accurate copyist, but we have no evidence to present on this point. We do not know just when Dr. Jones acquired the copy from Mr. Gould, nor do we know why Dr. Jones did not publish the letter himself. It is most likely that Dr. Jones's friend, the printer E. B. Hill, secured a copy of the letter, for Dr. Jones regularly shared his "finds" with Hill, with A. W. Hosmer in Concord, and with Henry Salt in England. Hill in 1917 published Thoreau's letter to Rice in a pamphlet Two Thoreau Letters, but his transcription of the fair copy is not entirely accurate (we assume he

did not locate the holograph), and he did not recognize Thoreau's poem to be a poem and presented it as prose. The Hill text was adopted by Harding and Bode in The Correspondence of Henry David Thoreau; the only other text available to them was printed by F. B. Sanborn in his 1917 biography of Thoreau, and Sanborn was notorious for altering Thoreau's manuscripts.

Sanborn knew of the letter from Hill's printed version and from A. W. Hosmer's Thoreau Collection.⁵ Sanborn's note in The Life of Henry David Thoreau makes it appear that the holograph was in Hosmer's splendid collection, but this seems unlikely. It is not in the Hosmer Collection now in the Concord Free Public Library, and Hosmer did not enter the letter in the index to the Grangerized Salt biography where he placed his Thoreau holographs. We can find no evidence that Hosmer ever owned Thoreau's letter to Rice. It is more likely that Dr. Jones provided Hosmer with a copy of the fair copy acquired from Gould and that Sanborn consulted that copy, which is no longer in the Hosmer Thoreau Collection. Sanborn's transcription of the letter varies greatly from the fair copy version in Dr. Jones's possession, though Sanborn did recognize the poem; in characteristic fashion Sanborn made major changes in it, explaining: "In this singular epistle I have ventured to restore the rhythmical passage into what may have been its original form."⁶ Bode reproduced Sanborn's "restored" version in Collected Poems of Henry Thoreau.

* * * * *

The holograph of Thoreau's letter to Rice may still be found in an attic in Georgia or Michigan, but our efforts to find it have failed. Until the letter is found, it is our belief that the copy secured by Gould and reproduced above is closer to the original than versions published by Hill and Sanborn.

FOOTNOTES

¹Henry Williams, Memorials of the Class of 1837 of Harvard University (Boston: G. H. Ellis, 1887), p. 25. For biographical information on Rice we have also used his obituary in Christian Register, September 7, 1844. The Concord Free Public Library provided us with these obituaries, and the staff of that library was of great help to us as we were preparing this article.

²Walter Harding, The Days of Henry Thoreau: New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965), pp. 49-50.

³We have reproduced the paragraphing, spelling, and punctuation of the fair copy. We are indebted to the Rare Book Room of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign for permission to reproduce the fair copy and Dr. Jones's comment.

⁴For biographical information on Mr. Gould, we are indebted to Mrs. Robert Harrelson of Owosso, Michigan.

⁵This letter was in the collection of Alfred Hosmer at Concord and has lately been printed by E. B. Hill, of Mesa, Arizona." F. B. Sanborn, The Life of Henry David Thoreau (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1917), p. 61.

⁶Ibid.
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We are indebted to the following for information used in this bulletin. Please keep the secretary informed of items he has missed and new items as they appear. R. Adams, T. Blanding, W. Bottoroff, J. Butkis, A. Butler, J. Donovan, S. Dunbar, H. Durre, F. Fenn, M. Fenn, F. Flack, R. Fleck, G. Hannon, G. Hasenauer, C. Hoagland, E. Johnson, K. Kesegawa, A. Kovar, J. Laposa, N. Lehrman, Kuo-Chien Liang, L. Lionel, M. Manning, A. McGrath, J. Moldenhauer, M. Moller, J. Pontin, A. Seaburg, R. Stowell, R. Thompson, J. Tobin, G. VanBuskirk, J. Vickers, P. Williams, and E. Zeitlin.



1-11-54

NOTES AND QUERIES

Deborah Simmerman's book *ROCK AND SKY*, listed in the Summer bulletin, can be obtained from her at 5B Holbrook Ct., Rockport, Mass. 01966 for \$2.00 including postage.

Marcy S. Powell of Miami University writes to us that most dictionaries of quotations misdate Thoreau's journal comment about the trout in the milk as Nov. 11, 1854. This includes Bartlett's *FAMILIAR QUOTATIONS*; *EVERYMAN'S DICTIONARY OF QUOTATIONS*, Evans' *DICTIONARY OF QUOTATIONS*, Mencken's *NEW DICTIONARY OF QUOTATIONS*, and Tripp's *INTERNATIONAL THESAURUS OF QUOTATIONS*. The only one he found that gave it correctly (Nov. 11, 1850) was Stevenson's *HOME BOOK OF QUOTATIONS*. He adds, "The moral of the story would seem to be: If you are going to copy from other reference books, copy from one that is right--or take the trouble to check."

Charles Lind of Setauket, N.Y. has recently donated a copy of Harry B. Chase's "Henry Thoreau, Surveyor" from *SURVEYING AND MAPPING* for June, 1965 to the Thoreau Society Archives.

W. G. McInnes points out to us that whereas Thoreau in his journal for Aug. 30, 1841, says, "My life hath been the poem I would have writ,/But I could not both live and live to utter it," and Bronson Alcott, in his *CONCORD DAYS* (1872, p. 4) says, without acknowledgement, "Life's the true poem could it be writ,/Yet who can live at once and utter it."

The Current Co. of Bristol, R.I., has for sale a copy of the first edition of *A WEEK* sent by Thoreau to Charles C. Morse of Rochester, N.Y., with textual corrections in Thoreau's hand. Price: \$1850.

Rev. John F. Butkis (Box 685, Kamiah, Id. 83536) wants to know if anyone has a copy of Robert Wild's statuette of Thoreau he would be willing to sell.

We have recently read the manuscript of Mrs. William Delano's *PENCIL FACTORY: THE MEMOIRS OF CYNTHIA DUNBAR THOREAU*, a most imaginative and delightful work that we hope some perceptive publisher will bring out.

Former Thoreau Society president William Howarth is working on a lengthy article on Thoreau for the *NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC* according to the Aug. 10, 1978 *CONCORD PATRIOT*.

Edward Wagenknecht is working on a volume on Thoreau in the series of "psychographs" he has

published over the years.

Ramada Inns are planning to start construction soon on a 182-room motel directly across Route 2 from Walden Pond.

Michael West of the University of Pittsburgh has recently been awarded an ACLS fellowship to work on a study of paradox and wordplay in WALDEN.

Eleanor Goddard Worthen of Jamaica, Vermont, has recently found among the papers of her late father, Harold Goddard, a letter from Edward Emerson (R.W.'s son) commenting on Goddard's book *STUDIES IN NEW ENGLAND TRANSCENDENTALISM* (1908), saying in part, "Your paragraphs on that friend of my childhood and early youthk Henry Thoreau, are good. It is a satisfaction to see that Lowell's essay (quite unworthy of him, and, had he written later, I believe he would have written quite differently) is losing its influence, and the nobility of Thoreau's character, and the beauty of his thought, when not trying to startle Mrs. Grundy, is felt widely here and abroad." (May 13, 1908).

Raymond Adams points out to us that in a recent issue of the *INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF PSYCHIATRY IN MEDICINE* (7, 1977, 329-336) there is an extended discussion of "Grief-Related Facsimile Illness" by S. Zisook and R. A. DeVaul which analyzes ten cases similar to Thoreau's illness after his brother's death.

According to the *NEW YORK TIMES* for Aug. 2, 1978, that when New York City recently started enforcing its new ordinance requiring dog owners to clean up after their pets, one irate dog owner protested that she intended to "read Thoreau to my cocker spaniel and teach her civil disobedience."

The Royal Bank of Canada's *MONTHLY LETTER* for July, 1978, after speaking briefly about Thoreau at Walden, concludes "We cannot all be Thoreaus; but there should be a little of the Thoreau in all of us if we are to make the earth safe for coming generations."

Charles Miskell has called to our attention that there is a mineral named "Thoreaulite." It is Tantalum-niobium oxide tin oxide--Sn Oz. (Ta, Nb)₂O₅. Can anyone tell us any more about it or how it got its name?

The Thoreau Society recently received from Lloyd Reep a gift of fifty dollars.

Edward Jarvis, in his manuscript "Traditions & Reminiscences of Concord" in the Concord Free Public Library, states that only eight Concord youths graduated from college in the 1830's: Marshall Merriam ('33) and J. Gardner Davis ('36) from Yale, and William Richard and William Whiting ('33), George Moore ('34), H. B. Dennis and E. Rockwood Hoar ('35) and Thoreau ('37) from Harvard. Of these eight, three became lawyers, two ministers, one an editor, one a doctor, and one (Thoreau) an author.

An event of great importance to Thoreau scholars is the new annual *Studies in the American Renaissance*, edited by Joel Myerson. See the bibliography in this bulletin under Blanding, Hudspeth and McDonald. We understand equally important articles are scheduled for later volumes.

Edwin Markham, the poet, wrote in *COSMOPOLITAN* (August, 1906, p. 393): "No greater service could be done the public to-day than the publication of (Thoreau's) "Life Without Principle," in a magazine of such general circulation as yours. I regard the essay as one of the largest and truest utterances of a man whom I rank higher than Emerson."

The personnel of the Walking Society changes from time to time, and in early fall we were joined by two great grand-daughters of Ellen Sewell, the girl Thoreau wanted to marry. It was great fun as we walked along the shore of Fairhaven Bay and again on the Old Carlisle Road to hear their family reminiscences of the fair Ellen. They showed us a daguerreotype of Ellen at the time she had been in Concord, and she was perfectly charming. It was no wonder Thoreau boys fell in love with her. If Henry was not acceptable to Ellen's father, the young minister of the Cohasset church was, and in 1844 Ellen and Joseph Osgood were married. They lived their long fruitful lives in that beautiful seaside town, raising a large family, and were at last buried in the old town cemetery.

Naturally at the first opportunity we travelled to Cohasset. Our first stop was the cemetery. We like to visit cemeteries, for seeing the graves of people we have read about always makes us realize that these were real flesh and blood people, and not just fanciful characters in a story. The graves were not easy to find, but with the help of the young superintendent and his charts, we did locate them. This was the very cemetery which Thoreau visited on his trip to Cape Cod, and where he saw the gaping hole dug for the victims of the shipwreck of the brig St. John. He also described the caskets being trundled to the meetinghouse where Joseph Osgood would conduct the mass funeral service. Joseph and Ellen Osgood's graves are under the shadow of the huge celtic cross which memorializes those who drowned in the shipwreck. The Cohasset cemetery is a particularly beautiful and peaceful spot, its high land jutting out into Pleasant Bay. We strolled down to the water's edge and for a time watched four snowy white egrets wading in the shallow water.

Across the road from the meetinghouse is the present Parish House. It had been the home of Ellen and Joseph. It is a fine colonial house with central hall, spacious rooms, and was flooded with sunlight through its many paned windows. The present minister, Mr. Atkinson, was most helpful, and showed us pamphlets about the half-century pastorate of Joseph Osgood. There was a picture of Ellen in late life, showing a mature woman but with traces of her early beauty. A large picture of her husband hanging on the wall showed him to be a kindly man with a twinkle in his eye. Mr. Atkinson took us across to visit the church, a charming 1747 New England meetinghouse with high pulpit, box pews, and galleries around three sides. It was beautifully kept and gave us a sense of the continuity of many years of service. There was a case of exhibits which included the original church book, hand written of course and yellow with age. The old minister's robe was there, bright red too, contradicting the notion that the early clergy wore somber colors. A chair thought to have been Mr. Osgood's was in a small robing room off the gallery.

We left Cohasset feeling that even though Ellen had always remembered Henry Thoreau with affection, and looked back with nostalgia on the months she spent in Concord, "where we were so happy", she did lead a very pleasant and fulfilled life in Cohasset.

